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PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHLA RUEHMRE RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHKB #1189/01 2231048
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FM AMEMBASSY BAKU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1019
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNOSC/ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY COOPERATION IN EUROPE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 001189

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/11/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT'S INDEPENDENT AND OPPOSITION MPS WORK
SEPARATELY TO CHANGE FACTION PROCEDURES

REF: BAKU 625

Classified By: ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION JOAN POLASCHIK PER 1.4(B,
D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Two proposals for changes to the number required for a faction in Azerbaijan's Parliament are on the horizon. Under the Azerbaijani Parliament's internal regulations, a party or faction must have 25 Members of Parliament (MPs) in order to originate draft legislation. A faction is also able to influence the Chair's decisions to grant speaking time. One proposal, led by independent MP Asim Mollazade, would lower the faction requirement to just 15 MPs; separately, opposition MPs seek to lower the requirement to 8-10 members. A change in the faction procedures would give independent and opposition MPs a greater voice in a body which is dominated - both procedurally and politically - by the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party. However, the competing proposals put forward by the independent and opposition MPs illustrate just how far politicians from outside the ruling party have to come to create a truly effective political bloc. END SUMMARY

MOLLAZADE'S INDEPENDENT MOVEMENT

¶2. (C) In a meeting with Poloff, independent MP Asim Mollazade shared his initiative to change the current number required for a faction in Azerbaijan's Parliament from 25 to ¶15. He personally is frustrated by the current, faction-based procedures for granting speaking time to MPs. Mollazade is gathering a faction of MPs comprised of businessmen and entrepreneurs. As of mid June, Mollazade said he had commitments from 14 MPs, and was fully confident that he would find one more. Mollazade gave a list of 12 of these MPs to Poloff. The names included are:

- ¶1. Vagif Vekilov
- ¶2. Azer Kerimov
- ¶3. Cingiz Asadullayev
- ¶4. Anar Mamedkhanov
- ¶5. Ulvi Quliyev
- ¶6. Fuad Muradov
- ¶7. Asim Mollazade
- ¶8. Azay Quliyev
- ¶9. Rafael Huseynov
- ¶10. Rufet Quliyev
- ¶11. Azer Amiraslanov
- ¶12. Rovsan Rzaev

(Note: Please protect the names on this list, as Mollazade stressed that it will not be made public until September).

HUSEYN'S PUSH FOR THE OPPOSITION VOICE

¶3. (C) In a separate meeting, MP Panah Huseyn informed Poloff

of the opposition's plan to change the number required for a faction. Completely independent from Mollazade's initiative, this plan aims to lower the number from 25 to 8-10 members required for a faction. Huseyn explained that under the previous proportional structure of Parliament, the number required for a faction equaled approximately six percent of the body's members. That number in the current Parliament would be 8-10 members, not the required 25 members. Echoing Mollazade's concerns regarding speaking time, Huseyn told Poloff that MPs are currently allowed only five minutes to speak, which is only half of the time permitted by law. Even worse, he continued, is that sometimes the full five minutes is not granted, and sometimes debates are stopped before the full number of speakers has been granted time. Huseyn expressed frustration that MPs rarely get a chance to speak, and that because of this, comments made by opposition members are sometimes perceived as more radical or provocative than intended.

¶4. (C) Musavat MP Nasib Nassibli told Poloff that Musavat agrees with Huseyn's arguments and would support his initiative, though he points out that Musavat (with four MPs) is already an unofficial faction. Though Huseyn and the Musavat MPs often work together, there is some discrepancy over his party ties. Nassibli said that Huseyn considers himself a Musavat party member, but that according to the party, he is not an official member. In addition, Huseyn's initiative will probably garner support from the "pocket opposition," said to consist of MPs Gudrat Hasanguliyev, Fazil Gazanfaroglu, Aynur Jamalova, Sabir Rustamkhanly, and Iqbal Aghazade. Nassibli explained that this group is referred to as the "pocket opposition" because it thought that while these MPs present themselves to be members of the opposition, they have strong ties to the GOAJ.

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COMMENT

¶5. (C) The competing proposals put forward by the independent and opposition MPs illustrate just how far Azerbaijani politicians from outside the ruling political party have to come to create a truly effective political bloc. Of the two proposals, Mollazade's - to change the number required for a faction from 25 to just 15 - is likely to be an easier sell to Parliamentary leadership. Mollazade's rumored close ties to the ruling party also could help ease the way for incremental and less-threatening changes to parliamentary procedures. The opposition - with just a handful of MPs - still would be unable to form a faction under Mollazade's proposal. At best, if the Musavat MPs, the "Pocket Opposition," and other pro-opposition MPs all supported Huseyn's proposal, the effort would only garner the support of eleven MPs. While some of independent MPs may back the movement to change the number required for a faction, it is highly unlikely that any would go so far as to join a faction created by the opposition MPs. A change in the parliamentary rules of procedure definitely would give independent and opposition MPs a great voice in Parliament and, in our view, would help make Parliament a more democratic institution.

¶6. (C) BIO NOTE: Although Mollazade calls himself independent, many believe that his is closely aligned with the ruling party. Speculation persists that Mollazade is on the payroll of Minister of Emergency Situations, Kamaladdin Heydarov. Mollazade is seen at nearly every reception in town, and certainly plays to his audience. At one Embassy function, Poloff heard Mollazade tell the Israeli DCM that he is a "supporter of world-wide Zionism and American imperialism." It's not clear whether this was said tongue-in-cheek.

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